

Ponds

A well-planned backyard pond can support ornamental fish while providing water to mammals and amphibians that seek ground level water sources. A pond can take the shape of a rigid pre-molded container or a hand-dug hole with a plastic liner.

- Avoid locating a pond in deep shade as shade and fallen leaves promote water stagnation. Since full sun promotes algae growth, situating a pond in a partly shady/partly sunny location is best.
- To minimize the likelihood that wildlife (especially newly-fledged songbirds) will drown in a steep-sided pond, use rocks to create an island and include aquatic or potted plants submerged in the water. Provide at least one area of water-level pond “shoreline” where a waterlogged animal could exit the water. An “escape ladder” can be created by installing a length of garden mesh or window screen material stretching from the pond bottom, over the lip and anchored on the pond edge.

Frogs & Toads

Frogs are more dependent on water than toads and will need a pond for survival. Toads can survive if provided with shelter in a damp area and a saucer of water. Frogs and toads are very susceptible to pesticides. Montana is home to 11 species of frogs and toads many of which, depending on where you live, may inhabit your property. Moving amphibians from other habitats or capturing a frog to release in a pond will amount to a death warrant for your new captive. Never purchase frogs or toads through the mail or from pet stores as they can harm the native species by displacing them or introducing diseases. If you provided adequate shelter and water and do not spray pesticides, frogs and toads adapted to your area will move in within a few years.

Butterflies

To attract these “flying flowers” to your backyard provide plants that are needed during all butterfly life stages, including a suitable place to lay eggs, food plants for caterpillars, a place to form a chrysalis, and food for adult butterflies. Most butterfly caterpillars do not cause the leaf damage characteristic of moth caterpillars. Butterfly caterpillars prefer nettles and thistles. Adult butterflies sip nectar from flat-topped flowers with colorful blossoms. Short flower tubes allow a butterfly to reach the nectar. Plant flowers such as cosmos, marigold, zinnia, yarrow, shasta daisy, purple-cone flower or bee balm. Butterflies prefer flowers in open, sunny areas. A butterfly garden will attract other beneficial insects, as well.



Hummingbirds

The smallest of all birds can hover like a helicopter while it sips nectar and eats tiny insects. Hummingbirds are attracted to red tubular flowers in flowerbeds or hanging baskets. Plant flowers such as fuchsia, salvia, zinnias, columbine, and lilies. Hummingbird feeders should be hung in the shade and filled with a sugar solution of 4 parts water to 1 part sugar. Boil the solution and store any unused liquid in the refrigerator. Hummingbird feeders should be cleaned and refilled every 3 to 5 days. Hummingbirds are territorial and will defend their food source from other hummingbirds. Locate hummingbird foods in several areas of your yard to discourage dominance by one bird.

Good Bugs

There are many “good” insects you will want to encourage to visit your yard and garden. Ants, bees, hover flies and other insects are important pollinators. The adult and larval stages of dragonflies and ladybugs, the larva of green lacewings, and nearly all spiders prey upon “bad” bugs. These natural predators won’t eradicate all undesirable insects but they will help reduce their populations. Be cautious when using insecticides since they harm beneficial insects, as well as nuisance insects.



Bats

These flying mammals should be a welcomed asset to your yard. Bats consume impressive quantities of insects every night, especially mosquitoes, beetles, and moths. You can encourage bats to roost in your yard by installing a bat house. An organization called Bat Conservation International, Inc. (BCI) is an excellent resource for information about bats and features ‘The Bat House Builders Handbook.’ Find BCI on the web at www.batcon.org. Many bat houses are never occupied because of poor design or installation in a manner that does not meet the needs of bats. See FWP’s Living With Bats brochure for information about excluding bats from buildings.



For Further Information

The Audubon Society Guide to Attracting Birds. 1985. Stephen W. Kress. Charles Scribner’s Sons. New York.

Backyard Habitats. Leaflet by George H. Harrison. Hubertus, Wisconsin.

Dead Snails Leave No Trails. 1996. Loren Nancarrow and Janet Hogan Taylor. Ten Speed Press. Berkeley, CA.

Gardening With Wildlife. 1974. National Wildlife Federation. Washington, D.C.

The Wild Garden – making natural gardens using wild and native plants. 1985. Violet Stevenson. Penguin Books. New York.

Wildlife In Your Garden – Dealing with deer, rabbits, raccoons, moles, crows, sparrows, and other of nature’s creatures in ways that keep them around but away from your fruits and vegetables. 1983. Gene Logsdon. Rodale Press. Emmaus, PA.

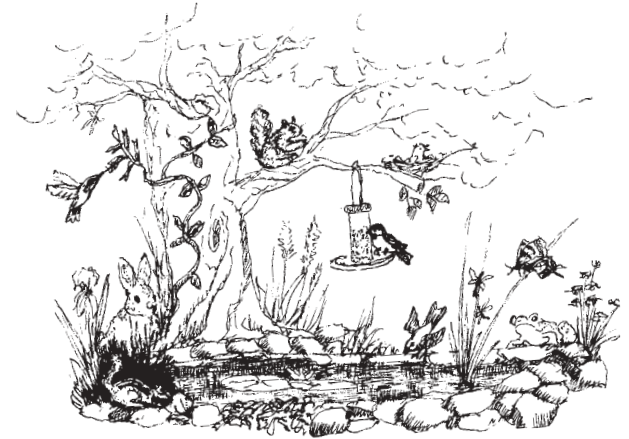
Wild Neighbors The Humane Approach to Living with Wildlife. 1997. John Hadidian, Guy Hodge and John Grandy, eds. The Humane Society of the United States. Washington, D.C.

Wildwords is designed for the novice at wildlife gardening. <http://www.wildwords.com/>

The **National Wildlife Federation** site offers overviews on creating backyard wildlife habitats, how to get your backyard certified and fun things for kids to do. <http://www.nwf.org/habitats/>

Welcoming Wildlife To Your Backyard

A hummingbird sips nectar from a columbine blossom near the kitchen window. In the distance, chickadees splash in the birdbath while a cottontail nibbles grass beneath a bush. With some research and thoughtful planning, you can transform your yard into an inviting space for wildlife.



Providing backyard wildlife habitat need not be expensive if you phase in plantings over a period of several years and do some of the work yourself. Maintenance should cost no more than the average lawn and, in fact, may be less expensive and time consuming since wildlife benefits from a *wilder*, less-manicured space.



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Getting Started

Planning a space attractive to wildlife can range from installation of a simple birdbath or bird feeding station to a more comprehensive landscaping plan. What you decide to do in your yard depends upon the wildlife species that inhabit your area, the space available, and the effort and expense you are willing to devote to such a project.

- First research and develop a plan of action. Find out what backyard wildlife species inhabit your area. Learn about their habitat requirements. Consider which ones you want to attract to your yard, and how you might accomplish that while avoiding inadvertently attracting less welcome species.

“**Backyard Wildlife**” refers to species well suited to living compatibly with people, including birds, bats, small mammals, butterflies and other insects. It is illegal to provide supplemental food to game animals such as deer, elk and bears. Doing so creates a threat to public safety and spreads disease.

- Make a sketch of your property. Evaluate which plantings need to be planned around, moved or eliminated. Seek advice from a local nursery or the County Extension Office about plants favored by selected species that thrive in your area. Native plant species are often the best choice since they are adapted to the area and are generally disease resistant.
- For a new lawn or immature landscaping, develop a long-term plan that provides phased-in improvements over a period of several years.
- Be realistic in your expectations. Each species has different habitat requirements and you can’t expect to provide all requirements for all species simultaneously.

Habitat Requirements

All creatures must fulfill four requirements to survive and reproduce: food, water, cover, and nesting/rearing habitat. Depending on the size and characteristics of your yard, you may be able to provide one or more of these requirements. The most basic plan for providing wildlife habitat includes a diversity of trees and shrubs of various heights, water and open space.

Food

Seeds, berries, nuts, insects, worms, grass, leaves and buds are important wildlife foods. Provide natural wildlife forage by planting food-bearing trees and shrubs.

- Select a variety of plants that have different blooming and fruiting periods to maximize the time period that your yard can provide wildlife foods.
- Refrain from spraying pesticides that kill insects that serve as wildlife food or are beneficial in the garden.



In the web of life, some animals prey on others in order to survive. Attracting wildlife invariably attracts predators. Don’t be surprised or upset if a hawk flies away with a pine siskin or a snake devours the pond frog. Instead, take pride in the fact that your backyard supports a diversity of wildlife and natural processes.

Observe the birds found in your area and seek the advice of a reputable birding business to determine the kinds of food and appropriate type of feeder to install.

A variety of bird feeders are available for purchase or you can build your own.

- To minimize predation by neighborhood cats and other predators, feeders should be mounted at least 4 to 5 feet above ground on a post or suspended from a tree or pulley mechanism.
- Galvanized pipe or installation of a metal band or “cone” on a wooden post is one way to predator-proof a bird feeder.
- It’s a good idea to locate your feeder near a tree, shrub or hedge. Birds like to survey a feeder from a perch before eating and can seek cover from hawks and falcons in foliage.

Cover & Reproduction Areas

Wildlife needs safe places to escape from predators, find shelter from weather extremes, and bear and raise their offspring.

- Mature trees provide nesting sites for birds and squirrels. If it is safe to do so, leave snags or dead trees on your property for cavity-dwelling wildlife.
- Hedges provide good cover for small mammals and birds.
- Limit the pruning of trees and shrubs where wildlife likes to hide and let leaves remain where they fall.
- Observe the species of birds that frequent your yard and plan trees, shrubs or a birdhouse suited to their preferences.
- Rock piles, rock walls and brush piles provide cover for rabbits and chipmunks. However, they may also provide shelter to snakes, skunks or other less welcome wildlife species.
- Let your plants go a little wild, but don’t create a jungle that is unusable. Remember to leave some open space, which serves as a foraging area and provides better wildlife viewing opportunities.

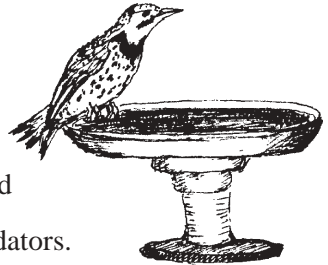
The greatest variety of wildlife use “edge” areas where two or more different habitat types meet.

Water

If your yard features a pond, marsh or stream then you are already providing this essential component. If not, there are several ways you can incorporate water for wildlife into your yard. Water can be provided in a container as simple as an overturned garbage can lid or flower pot saucer, or in a birdbath or fabricated pond.

Birdbaths

Birds like to use birdbaths that are raised off the ground and provide good visibility to see predators.



- Within a 10’ to 12’ radius of your birdbath, eliminate low hanging branches that could hide a predator.
- Birds prefer shallow water, no more than 2 inches deep, and butterflies are attracted by even shallower and smaller sources of water. Add rocks to provide safe perches and different depths of water.
- Scrub and change the water frequently since dirty water can spread disease.
- The container should have sloping sides and a rough surface that provides safe footing. Concrete is an ideal material for birdbaths.
- When providing water in the winter, use a submersible heater to prevent the water from freezing.

Birds are attracted to the *sound* of water moving. Create a homemade dipper by making a small hole in the bottom of a bucket or plastic bottle and hang it over a birdbath or pond. Even the gentle sound of this dripping will entice a bird to visit. Commercial drippers and misters are also available. For ponds add a pump to recirculate water and create a waterfall.